



Dedication: *It's all allowed: inspired by Adrian*

LAURA BISSELL

The Scottish Journal of Performance
Volume 5, Issue 1; April 2018
ISSN: 2054-1953 (Print) / ISSN: 2054-1961 (Online)

Publication details: <http://www.scottishjournalofperformance.org>

To cite this article: Bissell, L., 2018. Dedication: *It's all allowed: inspired by Adrian*. *Scottish Journal of Performance*, 5(1): pp.13–18.

To link to this article: <http://doi.org/10.14439/sjop.2018.0501.02>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> for details.

DEDICATION:

It's all allowed: inspired by Adrian

LAURA BISSELL

DOI: 10.14439/sjop.2018.0501.02

Publication date: 6 April 2018

The work of Glasgow-based performance-maker Adrian Howells who worked and taught at both the University of Glasgow and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland was in our thoughts as we devised the frame for the collaborative symposium *The Art of Care-full Practice*. Adrian's solo work focused on a communal live moment, a one-to-one exchange, a shared touch, a taste, and a moment of care from him to you in a framed performance setting. When Adrian took his own life in 2014 after a long struggle with depression, Dee Heddon (one of the symposium organisers) and Dominic Johnson embarked on an edited collection celebrating the artist's life and work in the field of intimate and one-to-one performance. *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells* was published in 2016 and, like *The Art of Care-full Practice* (and this subsequent special issue of the *Scottish Journal of Performance, Art of Care*), attempts to understand the key themes of care and intimacy that permeated Adrian's performance practice. My dedication to Adrian draws on this book—an act of love—and the documentation of Adrian's live works, which I introduced and showed at the symposium. These, and our memories (many of which are in the book), are the precious materials Adrian left behind. The book, the symposium and this journal continue to ask the questions Adrian grappled with in his performances: How do we take care of each other? How can we take care of ourselves?

Before commenting further on Adrian's work and the book

which reflects on his processes, practices, and how his life informed his art (and vice versa), I must do something which I hope Adrian would approve of. I must confess. Adrian often invited me (and many others) to confess within our shared performance moments and so I do this willingly (it is *all* allowed after all). I confess that in this exploration of Adrian's autobiographical work *my* self is also present. In *It's All Allowed*, I co-edited a section with Jess Thorpe called 'Pillow Talk' (a discussion with fellow artists and friends of Adrian towards the end of the book [pp.288-300]); I was curator of the 2013 Arches Commons events; and, more enigmatically, I am the unknown photographer who captured the image of Adrian in full Adrienne attire blow-drying Rhiannon's hair as she looks into the mirror (Adrian Howells in *Salon Adrienne*, 2005, photographer unknown [p.135]).

This recognition of *my* self in the work is relevant to this reflection, as Adrian's approach in many of his performances was to ask you to share a bit of *your* self (or one of your selves) and in return, he would give you a bit of *his* self (a story, a touch, an experience or a gift). The themes of intimacy, risk, generosity, and identity feature in most of the contributions to Heddon and Johnson's book (including Adrian's own), but the dark side of this is evident when one negative review of Adrian's 2011 show *May I Have the Pleasure* sent Adrian's mental health into decline. In sharing so much of *his* self in his work, he was vulnerable to perceiving critique of his work as a critique of himself: ('I gave so much of myself' [p.91]).

The book opens with Adrian's ridiculous aim—he laughs as he is saying it—he wants to generate a 'global catharsis' and for his art / life encounters to bring about a 'collective transformation' (p.13). While this may seem both sublime and ridiculous, the moral imperative of Adrian's art / life and his fluctuation between serious and silly as he

interrogates what is permissible and impermissible in a performance space is clear throughout the collection. *It's All Allowed* voices the various versions of Adrian Howells in all of their glorious multiplicity and contradictions. Both delicate (as in *Lifeguard*, [2012]) and daringly naughty (as in *The Homosexual* [1971]—described as ‘a hymn to tastelessness’ as discussed in Stewart Laing’s essay and Johnson’s interview with Adrian), Adrian’s various selves come through the articles, essays, creative responses and images. Meditative, (*The Garden of Adrian* [2010], explored by Heddon, Ibal and Zerihan) or explicitly bawdy (*An Audience with Adrienne* [2006-2010], as Cairns acknowledges in his own confession), self-flagellating (as in *The Fourteen Stations of the Life of Adrian Howells* [2007-2008]) or self-effacing (as in his work at Touchbase [2011-2014]), the *Adrians / Adriennes* of this book are as multiple, conflicting, and complex as Adrian was in person. Of course, there are *Adrians* this book inevitably misses or erases, but the richness of the sense of his identity, creative practice / research and personality comes through vividly and provides a beautiful interweaving of performances, documents, stories, legends, myths, memories and experiences of the late artist.

In Katie Gough’s ‘Sole History: The Grammar of the Feet in Foot Washing for the Sole’, she imagines the various churches of her childhood, the church in Glasgow where she experienced Adrian’s piece and *The Church* as ‘like a single melody of an arpeggiated chord, where the notes are not played together but spread over time’ (p.207). Reading *It's All Allowed* creates a similar feeling, a collection of notes (mostly in the same key) coming together to create an audio loop, some notes repeated more frequently, and some resonating longer than others.

Time, and the passing of a person, particularly an artist, changes the way in which we view their work. What is

experienced *live* as a continual process of working, attempting, applying for funding, being programmed and produced (Shelley Hastings and Jackie Wylie, 'Duty of Care' [pp.252–59]), administrating (Steven Greer, 'What Money Can't Buy' [pp.260–70]), becomes a canon of work, or as Heddon and Johnson offer, a *corpus*. This body of work that Adrian created, transcends Adrian's life and has provoked a new analysis and critical focus on some of the areas he held so dear. The contribution by Nic Green (the first recipient of the Adrian Howells Award for Intimate Performance), 'Legacies of Darkness and Light', attests to this (pp.300–4).

Some of the voices in this book writing about Adrian are also voices in *Art of Care*. Steven Greer, Rosana Cade and myself all speak about love, care, self-love, intimacy, risk and the life of an artist. The echo of these themes explored in *It's All Allowed*, can be heard resonating clearly through this journal and this is a testament to Adrian as an artist who was able to explore these ideas in such a vulnerable, fragile and sometimes dangerous way. The palimpsests of overlapping voices speak about Adrian and his work through varying degrees of grief, sadness, joy, Marcia Farquhar's 'utter selfish fury', and love (p.183).

Howells' own voice appears throughout Heddon and Johnson's book, (a physical impossibility for this journal but the impact of Adrian's voice, work and attempts can be seen, heard and felt here through others) and I paid particular attention to these documents of Adrian's own voice, what was *he* saying about his work? That his voice is in this collection is vital and although already published elsewhere, Johnson's interview with Adrian provides a powerful but painful read ending with the artist's words:

I'll put my hand into the fire. I've been burnt. I
put my hand back into the fire. When I do so I
know I am alive. That's the power of

performance. But it can also feel like a fatal attraction to getting burnt (2016, p.118. Previously published as 'The Kindness of Strangers: An Interview with Adrian Howells', *Performing Ethos*, Volume 3, Issue 2, 2012).

You, (the reader) are the *audience-participant* to this particular performance text. Like Adrian's work it depends on dialogue, connection and intimacy. You, (like me) are in it, without you it is nothing, and that is the legacy of Adrian's work that *It's All Allowed* gifts to a wider community. Inspired by Adrian, we hope that the live event of *The Art of Care-full Practice* symposium and this *Art of Care* special issue can keep Adrian's lifelong enquiries about connection, intimacy and risk alive: How do we take care of each other? How can we take care of ourselves? How can it be 'all allowed'?

Like *It's All Allowed*, this *Art of Care* special issue of the *Scottish Journal of Performance* is dedicated 'To Adrian'. You are missed.

References

Heddon, D. and Johnson, D. eds., 2016. *It's all allowed: the performances of Adrian Howells*. London: Live Art Development Agency and Bristol: Intellect.

The Art of Care-full Practice [symposium], 2017. Organised by Laura Bissell, Laura González and Simon Murray. University of Glasgow, 5 March 2017.

About the author

DR LAURA BISSELL is a lecturer in Contemporary Performance Practice and part-time lecturer in Research at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Laura is a visiting lecturer on the MRes in Creative Practices programme at Glasgow School of Art and has taught on the Transart Institute MFA in Berlin. Laura has presented her research on contemporary practices at conferences nationally and internationally and has had her work published in the *International*

Scottish Journal of Performance
Volume 5, Issue 1

Journal of Performance Art and Digital Media; Body, Space & Technology Journal; Studies in Theatre and Performance; Scottish Journal of Performance and Contemporary Theatre Review.